



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 83

RESTORING THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE

In his State of the Coast Guard remarks last week, the Commandant highlighted the progress we have been making in filling both the active duty and reserve forces. He included a statement that reflected his frustration, as well as all of us in Human Resources, of the most difficult job before us. ADM Loy stated that our most intractable rebuilding challenge is filling civilian positions. Further, he stated, "This system seems to be just plain broken." By system, the Commandant was referring to outdated Federal personnel systems, a tight labor market, and resource constraints. His concern is about the significant shortfall we still have in the civilian workforce and the importance of restoring our numbers to authorized levels and doing so in a timely manner. Those of us in Human Resources share this concern. These remarks were not intended as a reflection on the efforts and direction we are taking in the Civilian Personnel Program. They were not a criticism of our people who are trying to make it work. In fact, we are making progress in restoring the workforce and the numbers are moving in the right direction. However, the reality is that we are still way behind the power curve and it will take time, uncommon effort from our CGPC-cpm staff, and steady support from management to rebuild the civilian workforce.

The challenge is extraordinary. However, we are turning the corner and have reversed most of the negative trends. Indicators are now trending in the positive direction, thanks to both the Chief of Staff and the Commandant's support. As I briefed at the Spring 1999 Flag/SES Conference, all the civilian workload indicators that supported a reduction in civilian personnel management capacity and therefore provide Coast Guard budget savings, no longer apply. All are significantly increasing, while the total number of civilian positions is approaching the pre-streamlining level. In fact, in FY 00 we are now just 39 short of the 6250 pre-streamlining size. Meanwhile, the Federal workforce is faced with the same, if not more formidable challenges as recruiting a military workforce, in terms of low unemployment, an aging workforce, competition from the private sector and growing lack of public interest in working for the Federal government

In face of these challenges, our significantly undersized CGPC-cpm staff was experiencing a 33% turnover rate in FY99. As I reported in Flag Voices 48 and 49, we received the Chief of Staff's support to rebuild our civilian personnel management capability. This rebuilt capability is geared towards

gradual progress versus a major surge. While some shortfalls still remain, solid progress has been made toward filling the staffing shortfalls. Meanwhile, we have been aggressive in employing the Office of Personnel Management and civilian contractors to increase our capability to restore the civilian workforce. .

Please note that we had imposed a vacancy rate of about 11 percent throughout our streamlining years, so we have been fighting from a significant deficit, similar to the military workforce, active duty and reserve. Filling one civilian vacancy internally creates additional vacancies, while filling from an external source may require extensive re-advertising before managers find the quality of candidates they want. As we gain accessions we also have attrition which impacts our overall net gains. It is an uphill battle that requires a lot more recruitment actions than in the past in order to offer both developmental opportunities for our current workforce and to attract well qualified and diverse external candidates. As an example, in the last six month period it has taken about 850 completed recruitment actions to increase the permanent civilian workforce count (net gain in permanent on board strength) by about 70 people. ADM Loy remarked in his address that we didn't get into the readiness bind overnight, and we will not be able to restore our full readiness overnight. This is true of restoring the workforces.

We will continue to look at systemic problems in filling the civilian workforce. We have implemented initiatives to provide centralized funding for recruitment and relocation bonuses and retention allowances; requested recruiter positions in the FY01 and FY02 budgets; increased personnel resources in CGPC-cpm and hired temporary contractors and employees in CGPC-cpm to meet increased workload. We're proposing changes to the "business rules" to provide greater flexibility in hiring. We have requested funding in the FY02 budget to fill developmental and intern positions to ensure a workforce of the future. We will continue to streamline our hiring processes and improve recruitment strategies where possible. We are now averaging more than 500 recruitment actions in progress and our current rate of new hires is 120% greater than last year at this time.

The Commandant and I have the most sincere appreciation and deepest respect for all members of our CGPC-cpm staff. These members of Team Coast Guard demonstrate exceptional dedication and personal initiative and have been working extraordinarily hard to fill the workforce. We ask you to work closely with us in restoring our workforce. Thanks!

Regards, FL Ames

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